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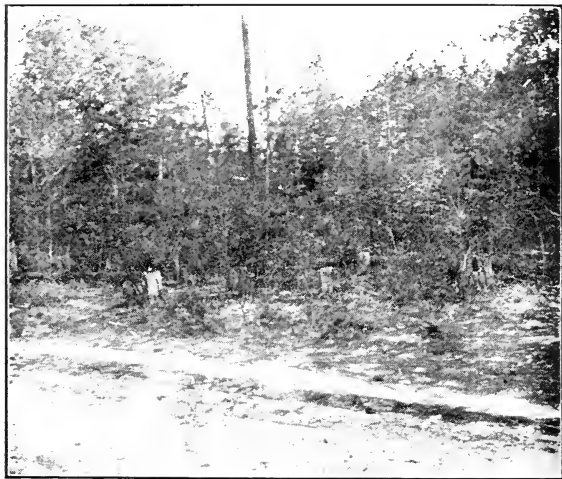
REV. JAMES O'KELLY

A Champion of Religious
———Liberty———

BOOKLET—TWO

By

J. F. BURNETT, D. D.
Minister in the Christian Church



Site of the old Lebanon Church, Surry County, Va. Here in 1794 the people known as "Republican Methodists," discarded all human names, and human creeds, and took the Bible alone as a sufficient rule of faith and practice, and the name Christian for His followers.



Present Lebanon Church building, Surry County, Va. Located near the site of the old building.

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FOREWORD

This is one of a series of booklets prepared and issued under the direction of the Secretary for Department of Publishing of The General Convention of The Christian Church, that the members of our churches and Sunday-schools may be well informed as to the history and distinctive principles of

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

which accepts and proclaims :

The Lord Jesus Christ as the head of the church.
Christian our only name.

The Bible our rule of faith and practice.

Individual interpretation of the Scriptures, the right and duty of all.

Christian character the test of fellowship.

The union of all the followers of Christ, to the end that the world may believe.

Several of the booklets are from the pen of John Franklin Burnett, D. D., who has given many years of his life to research and investigation of the subjects he presents. Others are by men of outstanding ability who have given many years of service in the Christian Church. They will present the distinctive principles of the Christian church as essentials in Christian life and the basis for church unity.

While the booklets have not been prepared es-

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pecially for study books, yet the subject matter presented can be studied with profit by the individual, students, Christian Endeavor societies, Sunday-school classes, etc., particularly as a part of programs for stated week-day meetings. It is the hope of the Secretary for the Department of Publishing that they will be given by pastors to all new members as they are accepted into church. They are also intended for general distribution, by pastors and religious workers in our churches, to those who may be interested in the church and principles of the Christians.

No. 1 is *The Origin and Principles of the Christians* with an account of the co-ordinating of the bodies of different sections.

No. 2 is a historical and biographical sketch of Rev. James O'Kelly, who courageously stood for individual liberty in religious thought and worship.

No. 3 sketches the life of Rev. Abner Jones, a pioneer in the thought that character and life are the true test of religious fellowship as over against dogma.

No. 4 is a sketch of the life of Rev. Barton W. Stone, a scholar and religious teacher who advocated that the Bible is the book of life, and the only rule of faith and practice necessary for a Christian, as over against any formulated creed.

No. 5 combines sketches of Elias Smith, publisher, and Horace Mann, educator.

FOREWORD

No. 6 gives sketches of the pioneer women workers of the Christian Church.

That all who use these booklets judiciously may be supplied, they will be sent free on request and payment of postage, 15c. for one dozen, 40c. for fifty, 75c. for one hundred. Order them from The General Convention of The Christian Church, or The Christian Publishing Association. Both are in the Christian Publishing Association Building, Dayton, Ohio.

If the hopes and wishes of the Department of Publishing are even in a measure realized, the effort and expense of the publication of the series will be justified.

O. W. WHITELOCK,
Secretary for Publishing.

The historical statements contained in this booklet were gleaned from many and varied sources, but mainly from the Life of James O'Kelly, by W. E. MacClenny, and Porter's Compendium of Methodism.

The quotations from James O'Kelly are as quoted in the Life of James O'Kelly, by Mr. MacClenny.

Mr. MacClenny has produced a rare book which should be extensively read.

The author of this booklet hereby acknowledges his obligation to the book, and expresses his thanks to its author.

REV. JAMES O'KELLY

A Champion of Religious

===== Liberty =====

The man is thought a knave or fool, or bigot plotting crime,
Who for the advancement of his kind, is wiser than his
time.

For him the hemlock shall distill; for him the ax be bared;
For him the gibbet shall be built; for him the stake
prepared.

Him shall the scorn and wrath of man pursue with deadly
aim,

And malice, envy, spite, and lies shall desecrate his name.
But truth shall triumph at the last, for round and round
we run,

And ever the right comes uppermost, and ever is justice
done.

—*Mackay.*

Neither the place nor the time of James O'Kelly's birth can be determined with absolute certainty. Virginia and North Carolina each lay claim to the distinction, and there is good reason for believing that he was a native of Ireland. Mr. W. E. MacClenny has written a full and reliable history of James O'Kelly, in which he recites the evidence concerning the birth place of the great man, and says: "In view of the above facts and the early traditions of the Christians, we come to the conclusions: James O'Kelly was born and educated in Ireland, came to America in early life,

seems to have settled near Moring's Post-office, in Surry County, Virginia, and lived there for some time before he moved to North Carolina."

Be this as it may, he had the faith and the courage of an Irish patriot, and the courtesy and bearing of a Southern gentleman. There is not as much uncertainty as to the date of his birth as to the name of the place. Appleton's Encyclopedia of American Biography names October as the month, and 1735 as the year of his birth. This date has support in the fact that he died October 16, 1826, in the ninety-second year of his age.

However, it may be stated that wherever and whenever born, he was well born, and probably knew the Scriptures from his youth up, for on one side his ancestors were priests, or preachers, as we now call them, and church builders on the other. Indeed, the blood of many high-born generations coursed through his veins, and found expression in his thought and conduct, and it may be reasonably concluded that he was creditably educated and in all probability had a fair knowledge of Greek and Latin. Be this as it may, he spoke the language of Canaan, and was a framer of phrases, and a master of subjects, with utterances so clear that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein. His conversion from sin was of the clearest type, and true to the law of God and the need of the individual. He was converted; and had an experience with God, and it changed his whole life; he knew Him in whom he

had believed, and was persuaded that He was able to keep that which he had entrusted to Him. The fact of this experience he himself sets forth in the following language:

"My first mental alarm was not through the blessed means of preaching; but by the kind illuminations of the invisible Holy Spirit. I saw by this Divine light that I was without God and destitute of any reasonable hope in my present state.

"Now being moved by faith through fear, I attempted to flee the wrath to come, and seek a place of refuge!

"But, O, what violent opposition did I meet with! After many sorrowful months I formed one resolution, with a low cadence of voice, and fearful apprehension, I ventured like Queen Esther who approached the king's presence, at the risk of her life, so I ventured in a way of prayer, to speak to the Almighty! With the Bible in my hand, I besought the Lord to help me, and declaring that during life that sacred Book should be my guide, and at the close, if I sunk to perdition, said I, Just, O God! yet dreadful! but if thy clemency and divine goodness should at last rescue me from the jaws of a burning hell, this miracle of grace shall be gratefully remembered by me, a moment of mercy!

"The things which followed, which were such things as belong to my peace, the inexpressible change, the instantaneous cure, I am incapable of speaking; but O, my soul was lodged in Immanuel's breast, the city of refuge; the ark of my rest."

His conversion was definitely announced, and strongly emphasized in the most forceful way,

for immediately he consigned his fiddle to the flame, and forever turned his back upon worldliness. It would not be possible for a mind and soul like his to remain satisfied with even such a glowing experience, and it is not surprising that he promptly entered the public ministry of the Church.

He was not far from forty years of age at the time of his conversion, and he immediately united with the Wesleyan Societies, and was sent out as a lay preacher, but he was not ordained until 1784, when he was a lay preacher to what is known in Methodist history as the "Christmas Conference of the Episcopal Church." Here he was ordained severally, a deacon and elder, by the Rev. Thomas Coke. From the first he became more and more a preacher of power, and a man of influence—the people flocking to hear him much as they did when all Judea and Jerusalem went out to hear the wilderness preacher of their day. Not only did he increase in power and popularity, but each succeeding year marked the divergence between the autocratic spirit of the Church, and the democratic spirit of the man. The question as to whether or not preachers should be allowed to administer the communion, baptize candidates, marry people, and bury the dead, always found Mr. O'Kelly on one side, and the rule of the Church on the other. Bishop Asbury's insistence that the laymen were to "*pay, pray, and obey*" was always objectionable to Mr. O'Kelly, and the divergence

increased, and the chasm widened, and the point of cleavage became more prominent, so that by the time the General Conference met in 1792 a crisis was inevitable. By this time, too, Mr. O'Kelly had reached a high place in the favor of the church. He had presided over some of the largest and most important districts within the territory then occupied by the Methodist Church, and only two men out-ranked him in authority. He had, in all probability, accumulated means sufficient to put him above the necessity of salary, and most certainly he had reached a well established leadership among his brethren. But it was not these that gave him prestige in the conference. It was his devotion to the right, his indomitable will, and his Christian courage. He would have been impressive had he been clothed in rags, and walking barefoot. The craven had no place in his makeup, either as a man or a preacher.

In that memorable Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, November 1, 1792, the forces lined up for final decision. The storm did not burst suddenly, nor unexpectedly. Men felt that something was impending, and stood ready for the shock. For several days prior to the opening of the Conference, Mr. Asbury had been holding meetings with the preachers whom he knew to be true to his bidding, and with them planned the sessions. Nor had Mr. O'Kelly been indifferent to the issue, for his forces were well marshalled, and stood ready for action. One of the bitterest disappoint-

ments of his life came when Dr. Coke, contrary to all he had promised him, and all he had lead him to expect, took sides with Asbury, and announced the findings of a committee that had been previously appointed, in the following words:

"The members of this Conference represent the people; and we are to all intents the legislature of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the government of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the government is autocratical. You may call me a weather-cock."

On the second day of the session James O'Kelly offered the following resolution:

"After the bishop appoints the preachers at Conference to their several circuits, if any one thinks himself injured by the appointment, he shall have the liberty to appeal to the Conference, and state his objection, and if the Conference approve his objection, the Bishop shall appoint him to another circuit."

This motion was discussed by the strongest minds, and ablest debaters, in the most masterly way, and was carried on at times with all the heat, passion and prejudice of the human heart, for three days. At one time it looked as though the motion would carry by a large majority, for the preachers in America had heard that the England Methodists had inaugurated the "Stationing Committee," which included the right of appeal. Finally the motion was divided into two parts, as follows: 1. Shall the Bishop appoint the preachers to the circuits? 2. Shall a preacher be al-

lowed to appeal? The first part was put, and carried unanimously, and with great enthusiasm. When the second part came to be considered, the question was raised as to whether or not it was a new rule, or an amendment to an old one. A new rule would require a two-thirds vote, while an amendment would require but a majority. It was after much wrangling that it was decided to be an amendment to an old rule. At one time during the debate, Mr. O'Kelly stood with a copy of the New Testament in his hand, and said: "Brethren, hearken unto me, put away all other books, and forms, and let this be the criterion, and that will satisfy me." He says, "I thought the ministers of Christ would unanimously agree to such a proposal, but alas, they opposed the motion." The Rev. John Dickens declared that the Scriptures were by no means a sufficient form of government; that the Lord had left that business to his ministers. O'Kelly says that he withstood him for a season, but in vain. "I now saw," said he, "that moderate Episcopacy was rising to its wonted and intended dignity. I discovered also that the districts had lost their suffrages." A Sunday intervened during the debate. The Rev. Dr. Coke preached in the forenoon, and James O'Kelly in the afternoon. All day Monday, and far into the night, was spent in debating the subject, when the vote was taken, and lost by a large majority. It is safe to assert that the debate was carried on

at such length for the purpose of causing a feeling of disgust with the oft repeated question, and oft reproduced argument, and that if the vote had been taken earlier, it would not have been seriously defeated, had it been lost at all. Three things should be kept in mind: One. James O'Kelly did not withdraw from the Methodist Church, but from the Methodist Conference. He did all that conscience and honor would allow to remain in the Church of his first years, and left it only when compelled so to do. Two. His withdrawal was on the question of government, and not on that of doctrine. Three. He was not alone in his withdrawal, neither was he alone in his opinions and decisions. Some of the best men of the Church stood with him in the debate, and followed him when he went out. When the conclusion was announced, James O'Kelly, and nineteen other ministers, withdrew from the Conference, to be followed by the churches they served. Mr. O'Kelly, and those associated with him in the withdrawal, held a conference at Piney Grove, Virginia, more to comfort each other than for any other reason. They had not withdrawn from the Methodist Church, nor did they desire so to do. While together they formulated an address to Bishop Asbury, asking that the whole matter be reopened and reviewed, and sent it to him by the hand of chosen men. They then adjourned to meet at Manakintown, Virginia, to hear the report from

the Bishop. They met on the 25th day of December, 1793, and received from the Bishop the following reply:

"I have no power to call such a meeting as you wish; therefore, if five hundred preachers should come on their knees before me, I would not do it."

After hearing this reply, there was nothing left for them to do but separate themselves from the Methodist Church, or slavishly submit to an ecclesiasticism which they had determined to resist, and they unanimously chose the former. They formed their ministers on an equality, gave the lay members a balance of power in the legislation, and left the executive business to the Church collectively.

On the fourth day of August, 1794, they met at Lebanon Church, in Surry County, Virginia, and held their session with open doors, which was wholly different from the method of closed doors, and secret sessions, as was the custom of the Bishop. Efforts were made to form a plan of government, but to no purpose. A committee of seven chosen men were appointed to draft the form. The committee could not agree, and the finality was that all else was set aside, and the "Word of God as revealed in the Scriptures" taken instead. Very prominent among the things they had to do at that Conference was the selection of a suitable name for the new organization. For the time since they withdrew they had been

known as Republican Methodists. Whether or not this name had been formally chosen, or incidentally applied, the writer does not know. After much discussion and earnest prayer, the Rev. Rice Haggard, standing with a copy of the New Testament Scriptures in his hand, said:

“Brethren, this is a sufficient rule of faith and practice, and by it we are told that the disciples were called Christians, and I move that henceforth and forever the followers of Christ be known as Christians simply.”

The motion was enthusiastically and unanimously adopted, since which time they have had no other. The Rev. Mr. Hafferty moved to take the Bible itself as the only creed, and this motion also was enthusiastically adopted.

No interpretation of the public life and service of James O'Kelly can be even approximately correct, except it be made in the light of his private character, and the time in which he lived and wrought. It is not difficult to deduce from even his meager writings, and that which has been written about him, sufficient evidence to prove that his personal character was beyond reproach. He must have been tender-hearted and deeply sympathetic; evidently he was manly, brave and generous; from what is revealed to us, it is safe to conclude that in him were the rugged, stalwart virtues of the man, joined with the softness and gentleness of disposition of the woman; he must have been incapable of guile, and liberal in his

estimate of men, and was at times too little suspicious of the guilefulness of others, though he was no mean judge of human character. Quick in his conception, rapid in his processes, he was sometimes hasty in his judgments, but always held them subject to evidence and argument, and with singular absence of personal pride, he would change them upon conviction. He had an instinctive horror of injustice, and a genuine contempt for meanness, and yet his hatred of the one, and his contempt for the other, were often modified by his abounding charity for all men. One must be impressed in reading of this noted man that, after he had strongly denounced a wrong, he would seek some palliation for the wrong doer, and try to find some mitigation for an offense which he could not overlook. He must have been firm in his friendships, and it seems that nothing could tempt him to an act which his conscience did not approve; no sophistry, no personal appeal, no promise of betterment, could move him from his fixed idea of the right. We know him to have been a man of profound religious conviction, holding unyieldingly to the truths of revealed religion. At times his faith seems almost superstitious, while his love for his home, and his own, was as deep and pure as the fountain of life. His big-heartedness, his unfaltering honesty in faith and practice, his frank and open manner, his independent thinking, his unswerving devotion to God and country, his lifelong service for the Church, together with the

other personal virtues which have been named, and many more which might be mentioned, makes the Rev. James O'Kelly a leader whose following would honor the greatest and the best.

And now, having had a hasty and imperfect glance at his personal and public life, attention should be given to the time in which it was spent. It was a time when the passions of men were stirred to their depth; when the sky of the future was darkened by clouds of approaching conflict. It was the time of the birth-throes of a nation, and the beginning of a sect. Methodism was being born, as well as American civilization, and political and religious tyranny was asserting itself to the limit of its power. England's heavy heel was on the neck of the colonists, and religious liberty was threatened with the domination of sectarian bigotry, and ecclesiastic intolerance. Asbury, the leading man of the new movement under Wesley, had declared, "That he came to teach the people, and not to be taught by them." The Church itself was not free from censure for its laxness in morals and devotion to truth, for sinful indulgence was as common among the clergy as neglect of duty in the laity. Drinking was a common habit of the Episcopal clergy, many of whom would drink to excess, and be hailed before the magistrate for disturbing the peace of the community, even at the dead hours of the night. A clergyman of that early day was known

to officiate at the morning worship, go home with a parishioner, and drink so much brandy that he would have to be tied to his gig, and a servant sent to lead his horse home, lest he lose his way and miss his house. Many of the people of that day were very poor, and some were quite rich, and there were constant clashings between squalor and luxury. The priests were proud, selfish, ignorant, and the laity openly wicked. And worst of all, it was a time of religious persecution, and that child of hell, now full-grown and wrathful, stalked abroad, seeking victims for his wrath, and occupants for whipping post and jail; and be it said to the shame of the clergy, that they furnished their full share of information, and did their full duty in persecuting the saints for righteousness sake. And in addition to all this, and much more of like character, the American Revolution was on, and honest men were so much at variance with each other on matters of government, that the Tory and the Whig, though they knelt at the same altar, oftentimes throttled each other for political reasons, and fought until friendships died, fellowship perished, and in many cases the body fell bleeding at the feet of a hitherto friend. There was a religious frenzy, and a political volcano, into which men were plunged, whether they would or not. The war clouds were scudding across the sky, the war dogs had been unleashed, and all men were standing at arms, both in the state

and in the Church, and no man dared to speak who was not ready to die. Into this seething, sizzling, boiling, turbulent condition of human society, James O'Kelly threw himself with an indomitable courage and heroic faith, and gave to the cause he had espoused all the vigor of his strength, all the force of his character, and all the means with which he had been blessed.

My interpretation of James O'Kelly leads me to present him as a Christian Democrat, a Moral Hero, and a Pioneer of Christian Liberty.

A CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT. He had from his childhood breathed the spirit of liberty. The mountain path was free to all; the wilderness road had no barriers; the homes of the pioneers were open to all comers; the fish in the sea, and the bird in the air, were not freer than the man of the wilderness, and this very freedom influenced his character and made it impossible for him to submit to rule or endure restraint. Then, too, American liberty was being born, and by the time he reached his manhood, it was a strong, healthy, robust spirit which the pioneer breathed to the full, even as he did the fresh mountain air of the morning. Of course it is understood that I use the word democrat with reference to its philosophic, and not its political sense. Real democracy is more than the mere framework of government. It reaches into the life and thought of the individual citizen, and proposes to secure to him all the right and priv-

ileges of his kind. It affords every citizen the greatest possible development of his powers, and the greatest and freest use of his rights, consistent with his duties to his neighbor, his country and his God. Self-will is not supreme in a real democracy; indeed there can be no democracy in a community where the people are self-centered, or self-seeking. A Christian democrat must assist his neighbor when in need, console the sorrowing, speak thoughtful words of encouragement, and fully share the joys of those about him. The sacrifice of self for the good of others is the only foundation upon which a Christian Democracy can be builded, and I submit that the Rev. James O'Kelly fully met the demands of such democracy. In the days of James O'Kelly there were at least two great aspiring leaders, both of whom were self-centered, and self-seeking—Asbury and Coke—which made it all the more difficult for O'Kelly to live his life, and make effective his plan, but he neither swerved from the path, nor faltered in the march. He was a man of peace, but was forced to fight. He was a dissenter for conscience sake. No controversy embittered him; no ecclesiastical opposition involved him in personal enmity; no contention ever called forth from his lips sneering allusions to an inferior. He contended with his brethren, but it was in the interest of the oppressed. He replied to those in authority with sharp rhetoric, but his rejoinders were full of love

and truth. There were two forces which made his greatness possible, and his democratic spirit effective. One was a sublime self trust. He leaned upon no man's arm. He walked a path untrodden by others, except they followed. He walked erect in every path of duty to which he was called to pursue. He accepted responsibility, and advanced with firm and steady step. His march centered on the consciousness of rectitude and duty. The other was that there was no royal road to place and power. That the best a man could do under the circumstances was his duty, and with rare singleness of purpose, and deep consecration, he devoted himself to the work he had to do. To him the daily obligation was "thus saith the Lord."

Very early in the history of Methodism the ecclesiastical form began to take shape, and show assertion, and immediately O'Kelly, with characteristic devotion, began his plans for defense, for to him Ecclesiastical Rule was unbearable. It was the desire and the plan of Asbury, and others, to Episcopize the Church. O'Kelly and his followers were willing for a Presbyterial form of government, and for that they pleaded, though O'Kelly was a staunch advocate of the republican, or congregational, form of church government. Voting by the preachers and people was a thing to be feared and dreaded by Asbury, and his immediate successors in office, but voting was the one thing O'Kelly believed to be Bibli-

cally right and wholly just to the people. The leaders made an effort to create a Central Council for the government of the new-born church, in which O'Kelly saw the development of an unbending ecclesiasticism, which he fought with a vigor characteristic of his strength and interest, and so well did he succeed that in the district over which he presided the Central Council was not recognized, nor enforced, for human rights, and human liberty, were well entrenched in the hearts of his followers. His vigorous and decided opposition to this Central Council was the entering wedge which finally separated him from the Methodist Conference. Of the plan, and his interpretation of it, he writes:

"I confess that on one side it discovers weakness, and on the other hand policy. But as we were men under authority, we feared to offend our superior. We often prayed that God would deliver the preachers from the curse of suspicion. This prayer had the desired effect on some of us. Francis proposed that no preaching house should be built for some time to come, by the people, without first obtaining liberty of the conference. I cogently opposed the motion, because I loved the people, and conceived it to be an invasion of their civil as well as their religious liberties. I contended on till I discovered Francis to be much displeased, and he answered and said unto me: 'I can stay in Baltimore as long as you, and if I do not carry this I will never sit in another council.'

"However, I obtained a small amendment, and

so gave over contending, and the business went on. In the evening I unbosomed myself to my brother, Philip Bruce, but from what I afterwards heard, I found that Solomon's bird had carried the news to the great man. However, I told Francis that instead of councilors, we were his tools, and that I disliked to be a tool for any man. The business was finished, and the whole collected, and I suppose prepared and sent to the press. I saw them no more until the resolves came out in print."

The conditions were a source of great mental, and soul, anxiety, and for a time sleep was denied him. He felt himself deceived, and imposed upon, for in the matters of government, as provided by the Council, neither preacher nor layman were recognized. Of this he wrote Mr. Asbury, calling his attention to the infant church, and asking for one year in which to consider the matter. The request was promptly denied, and the writer given to understand that neither he, nor the people, had rights that the Episcopacy was called upon to respect. O'Kelly says of Asbury's reply, "I now began to discover the rapid five years' growth of a 'moderate Episcopacy.' Whereunto shall I liken it? It is like a dwarf whose head grows too fast for its body." Not only in the matter of government did this champion of human rights and liberties take the part of the common preacher, but in the matter of ordination and administering ordinances. In the contention over the ordinances of the church,

there was for a while a visible separation between the church in the north, and the church in the south, but O'Kelly, with a bleeding heart over the situation, stood firmly by his conception of right. He believed that all men were equal before God, and that broad phylacteries, bordered garments, and mitred caps called for no more respect from men, than home-spun garments, coon-skin caps, and Indian moccasins. Mr. Asbury had demanded that he be addressed as Bishop, but O'Kelly felt that in the land of liberty and freedom, though yet wrapped in the swaddling clothes of its infancy, there was no place for an ecclesiastical head, and set his face steadfastly against it. He saw in that early day, what we have all come to see in these, that a Christian Democracy would profoundly impress not only the people of America, but the people of the whole world.

James O'Kelly, though a man of the wilderness, was a man of culture, refinement and justice, and to him to be just was greater than to be generous. He was a big man, with a big gospel, and he preached it in a big way. He was a firm believer in the capacity of every man to receive, enjoy and express that abundant gospel of life. To him every man was a child of God, and all things his, richly to enjoy, whether they were temporal or spiritual in character.

The greatest asset a nation, or a church, can have is not found in fertile soil, and large en-

dowments; not in great rivers, and eloquent preachers; not in mines of coal and iron, of silver and precious metals; not in the largeness of college buildings, and the architecture of temples; not in the transportation of great cargoes of merchandise across the seas; not in the organizations of forces according to the latest scheme for expert work, but in giving to the world such heroic spirits as the man, who for conscience sake dares to stand alone. The greatest asset that any nation, or church, can have, is a robust, self-respecting, intelligent, law-abiding, high-minded citizenship, and a membership of consecrated men and women, whose lives are given to the unselfish service of one another.

A MORAL HERO. The outstanding type of hero in history is the popular type, but the Rev. James O'Kelly is the true type. The statues that stand in the center squares of cities are mostly of battle fields. They are armored bronze, representing a bloody field in the midst of writhing agony, and ghastly death. It will not always be so. "Peace hath higher tests of manhood than battle ever knew," as much higher as a wounded spirit is harder to bear than a wounded body. I have even dared to think that if the eleventh chapter of Hebrews were written now, that the name of James O'Kelly would appear with those of Abraham, Moses, and the other heroes of faith, who, for the joy that was set before them, endured the cross and despised

the shame. I cannot forbear thinking of the heroism of the days that have been, in contrast with the days that now are. Our forefathers worshipped winter-long in frosty houses. Now the gentlest rain keeps home on Sunday many a member of an orthodox church. The reformers struggle to purge a city government of rascality, but fail because cowardly Christians fear for social and business interests. Great evils cry out for correction, and yet they remain, for lack of moral courage in the life of those who profess to believe. Every Christian needs to ask: What is my religion costing me? Not merely in money, but in life, in comfort and in service. When we come to estimate its cost to James O'Kelly, we find that it cost all that he had. The strongest tie that binds human hearts together is the tie of fellowship. Companionship is stronger than kinship, else Jonathan would not have forsaken his father, and given up his kingdom, for the companionship of David. James O'Kelly was a man of strong friendship, and had a passion for companionship. He loved with all his heart, or he loved not at all. The circumstances under which James O'Kelly lived were inevitably producing a separation between himself and the church he loved. The Church could not change, neither could the man, and when the eventful hour came he broke the tie that had bound him to many a life, for many a year, and went out to suffer, and to die if needs be, for the sake of the right as

he understood it. At the time of the separation, as stated elsewhere, James O'Kelly was a preacher of uncommon popularity and strength. He had been appointed to the Southern District of Virginia for ten consecutive years as presiding elder, and such was his standing in the district, and among his brethren, that he had nothing to fear as to a desirable appointment. There was nothing personally for him to gain by his position on the question of appeal, but everything to lose, as men count loss and gain. It was charged that he was ambitious, and sought the office of bishop. When this was charged, the man arose and said:

"I can appeal to the Lord, and am now ready to be qualified, that the man hath belied me to my face."

Only two men stood above him in authority, and none in popularity and influence as a preacher, and had he been passive, it is not unreasonable to assert that he would have been exalted and given authority over his brethren. The Rev. Mills Barrett, then of Norfolk, Virginia, said in 1839, "That James O'Kelly as absolutely ruled one branch of the Christian Church by his influence as ever Bishop Asbury ruled the Methodist Church by his episcopal authority." He had lived through many severe trials, and had about conquered the last of them all, and had he spoken peace to his conscience, and compromised with injustice, he would have been a leader in Method-

ism, and a hero in its history. But he had opinions, he believed, and hence came the separation.

As I write of this heroic man, I am reminded of the time when a great king of the East set up his image, and then sent to the princes, the governors and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication, and when he sent for them, they came. The princes, the governors and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Of course it must be right, for there are the great men of the nation, and the king himself, in favor of it.

"Then the herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up."

But some did not fall down. No cringing, cravenly spirit in them.

"Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said

unto them, Is it of purpose, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that ye serve not my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psalter and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made, well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that god that shall deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter. If it be so our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. ¶ But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Even so answered James O'Kelly, and that, too, with the same spirit of devotion, heroism and holy courage that characterized the three Hebrew worthies.

A PIONEER OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY. It was an unknown and an untrodden path on which James O'Kelly set his foot in that eventful hour when he withdrew, for he went out not knowing whither he went, but grandly, nobly, sublimely, he met the test, and patiently, but perseveringly, he pressed forward in the great task that lay before him, and through all the years he wrought right mightily for his king. He was no whimperer; not an hour was

lost in sulking; not an instant spent in criticism; not an instant wasted in mourning over his defeat; not a thought given to predicting the ruin of the Church he sought to save; not a glance backward to the place and things that had been his, but setting his face steadfastly toward the goal of a better service, he pressed on to the end. It would be a profitable pleasure to follow the road over which he traveled; to share with him the anxious hours; to keep him company on the burdened journey; to hear the groaning of his soul over the problems he was forced to solve; to see him on his knees before God at the midnight hour, as was his custom; to rejoice with him in the victories he won, and the progress he made; to walk with him as he blazed the way through the theological underbrush of an ecclesiastical forest, that it might be both safe and easy for his followers, but time and space combine against the pleasure. Suffice it to say that he reached the goal, and gave the world the slogan of the Church that has arrived, and which should be the slogan of the Church which is to come—It is

INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY IN JESUS CHRIST.

When James O'Kelly withdrew from the Conference, it was no part of his thought to do more than he had done—stand for the right of the preacher to appeal—but having done so much he had to do more. One step called for another, and

so step after step was taken, until the path broadened from the right of the preacher to appeal from human authority, to the right of the individual to interpret the Divine Word for himself. Just when this came about is not known. It was pioneer work that James O'Kelly was called to do; the theological forests in which he did his work were overgrown with tall, strong trees of unbending fiber. It had come over from England, prior to the Revolution, and while Wesley was more yielding those to whom he committed the care of the new-born church were as unbending as the oak of mature growth. But James O'Kelly knew the truth, and the truth had made him free, and in that is found the primal fact of religious liberty. Out of his experience of inner connection and communion with God came the self-respect and exaltation, the supremacy of conscience, and the purpose to realize his own place and destiny. When he realized this high prerogative he could admit no more lordship. It was to God alone that he bowed in reverent and loving submission, and humbly said, "Not my will, but Thine be done." With this self-respect and devotion to righteousness came courage and endurance, in the face of persecution and suffering; this secret of liberty and earnest, patient effort has been the common possession of all prophets and martyrs since liberty was first born. It inspired, directed and upheld the Pilgrim fathers, the Puritans, and the

Friends, both in the Old World and in the New. It was the guiding star of Roger Williams, of George Fox, of William Penn, and others, as certainly as it was of James O'Kelly, and it may be said that the need of the Church today is leaders filled with the Spirit of God, rather than ones familiar with the plans of modern experts in Church government. But what did he do? What path did he open? What contribution did he make? Wherein is the profit of it all? The answer to all these, and other inquiries of like character is, *In what he did for the individual.*

It may seem strange, but it is nevertheless true, that the desire for a united church existed in the hearts of many long years before the days of James O'Kelly and his co-adjutors, and many very earnest efforts were made to meet the desire, but the union sought for was based upon a system of theology. It mattered nothing that a man was right in life, if wrong in theology. The effort was to have all men think alike, no matter how diversely they might act. It is now a well known fact that all such efforts at union only created new divisions, until there were divisions innumerable, and theologies *ad infinitum*. In that early day men who felt woe is me if I preach not the gospel, soon came to feel woe is me if I preach not the doctrines of my church, and churches, so called, were multiplied, until the land was over-run with sectarian mills, grinding out Christians after the fashion of mak-

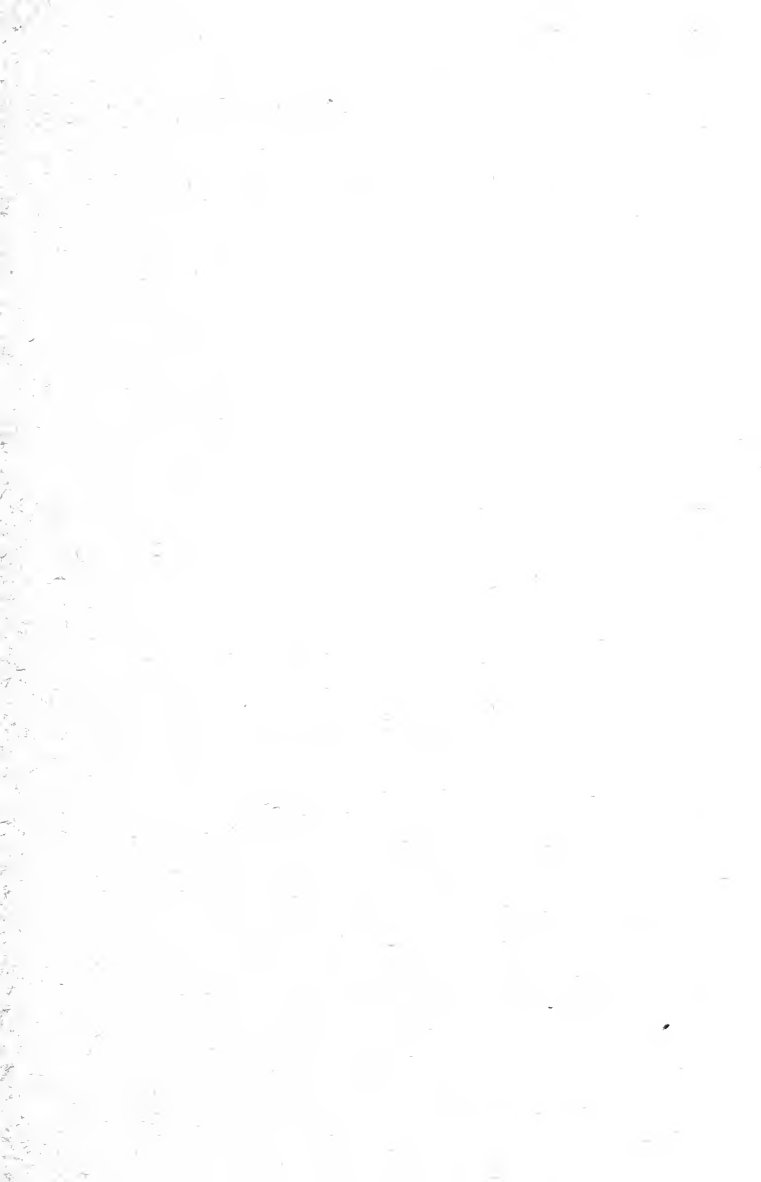
ing pins—all the same length of body and size of head. Indeed the church has not yet learned that creeds are the product of intellectual thinking, and often influenced by personal or sectarian prejudice. The church has yet to learn that by searching, the creature cannot discover its creator. God is not found as the astronomer finds the stars, and fellowship is a finer thing than that which is legislated into being. About the time of James O'Kelly the weeping prophets began to cry—Is there no balm in Gilead: Is there no physician there? Unconsciously it may have been, unintentional it certainly was, that James O'Kelly, and his fellow-laborers, responded to this appeal with the unhushable voice: "Yes, there is balm in Gilead, and there is a physician there," and this is his prescription for the cure of division, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another." It was a dark path on which James O'Kelly made his first footprint, but the path of the just shineth brighter and brighter, even unto the perfect day, and it has shone so brilliantly through all the years, that in the light of the present day, creeds, which at one time seemed as eternally fixed as the star in the sky, are rapidly losing their hold upon the heart and life of the church.

Under the ever spreading influence of the tree that has grown up from the planting that day in Baltimore, Maryland, the walls of sectar-

ian churches, once so high that they could not be preached over, seen over, prayed over, sung over, nor thrown over, are now toppling to their fall, and the believers in Jesus Christ are soon to be seated around one common communion table, where they will dwell together in the unity of the Spirit and the bonds of peace. It is a long, rough road over which we have come, but the goal is in sight. Patience, hope and faith of all progressive minds insure and justify perseverance, while they confidently await the fulfillment of our Lord's own prayer: "That they all may be one, even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us." The antiquated lines of cleavage which disrupt Christian fellowship are fading out. The Apostle Paul, on divine authority and with fine enthusiasm, proclaimed that in Christ the old dislikes and aversions, or distinctions, would disappear. In Christ Jesus there are neither Jews nor Greeks. Beyond the smoke of doubt and disaffection, scruples and squabbles, the chronic disorder of jealousy and prejudice and all ecclesiastical ambitions, the horizon shows our certain road to the promised land.

And withall James O'Kelly was a disturber, a fact to be appreciated, for men who disturb the smooth surface of human society are often sent of God, as was John the Baptist, whose words stirred all Jerusalem. Some men bless the world by aiding in its harmonious development. Others help the world by challenging its social customs.

and its religious beliefs. James O'Kelly opened questions which the church had long considered settled, but she has not yet given a satisfactory answer to some of them. He had his weakness, as all men have, but they were as spots on the sun. His life and teaching can never be outgrown. He is still the Christian statesman of the future, and there is no voice from out the past of our church which speaks with greater force and inspiration than that of the man who proclaimed that in all matters of right and privilege, the man in the pew was equal to the man in the pulpit. We acclaim him, and the Christian world will some day acclaim him, A CHAMPION OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.



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